

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I [ ] Charter [X] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Alesha Cavanaugh  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Westdale Heights Academic Magnet  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2000 College Drive  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Baton Rouge State LA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 70808-1923

County East Baton Rouge Parish

Telephone (225) 926-5421 Fax (225) 926-9885

Web site/URL http://westdaleheights.weebly.com/ E-mail acavanaugh@ebschools.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Sito Narcisse E-mail sitonarcisse@ebschools.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name East Baton Rouge School System Tel. (225) 922-5400

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. David Tatman  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 47 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 11 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 15 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 73 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)  
 Suburban  
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	22	34	56
1	39	29	68
2	42	25	67
3	31	42	73
4	37	32	69
5	35	33	68
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	206	195	401

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 14 % Asian
  - 36 % Black or African American
  - 3 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 46 % White
  - 0 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 7%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	28
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	28
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	412
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Arabic, Danish, Mandarin, Spanish, Turkish, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %  
3 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 9 %

Total number students who qualify: 36

8. Students receiving special education services: 6 %

23 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>0</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>1</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>20</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	18
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	69%	88%	86%	83%	90%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2008

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

The mission of Westdale Heights Academic Magnet School is to establish a student-centered program that fosters academic and social success.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, Westdale Heights Academic Magnet (WHAM) began semester one in August in a hybrid instructional model. As the COVID-19 restrictions and CDC guidelines were updated, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System transitioned to a combination of both face-to-face and virtual learning platforms. Parents were given the option to select the instructional model they preferred for their student(s). At the start of semester two in January, we had approximately 125 virtual students. Currently, approximately 68 of our 401 students remain virtual while the others have returned for face-to-face instruction. Parents still have the option of allowing their student(s) to remain virtual or return to campus. Our ultimate goal is to continue promoting safety procedures so all students will be able to return to campus in an effort to close any learning gaps that were caused during the pandemic.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Westdale Heights Academic Magnet is one of the oldest, and most sought after, elementary magnet schools in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. In an effort to promote equitable access to all demographic groups, WHAM’s online application is open to all students entering grades K-5 who reside within the East Baton Rouge Parish Schools attendance zone. Additionally, equitable opportunities for enrollment are maximized due to the lottery selection process. Eligible applicants are chosen through a lottery system, which is handled by a private company hired by the school system. Sibling enrollment and proximity to

WHAM are preferences which also affect the demographics of our student body. Selected applicants entering grades K-3 must meet minimum percentile ranking requirements on a norm-referenced, computer-based screening in both mathematics and reading. Applicants entering grades 4 and 5 must perform proficiently in English Language Arts and mathematics on the most recent standardized norm-referenced assessment and have an overall 2.5 grade point average for the last four consecutive semesters.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Westdale Heights Academic Magnet (WHAM) is a dedicated academic magnet with a focus on environmental science, mathematics, and technology. At WHAM, our vision is to educate the whole child - academically, physically, socially, and emotionally - developing productive and successful citizens for a diverse and changing society. To ensure a clear path towards our vision, school-wide goals that are aligned with our theme and foci have been developed. One of our goals is to produce students that are academically prepared for the next steps in their education, as well as their college and career endeavors. This is achieved by providing educational opportunities that are centered around engaging students and activities based on individual interests and strengths through a challenging curriculum, cutting edge teaching practices and strategies, and integrated technology experiences.

Our challenging curriculum incorporates critical thinking, social skills, citizenship, and the arts, while simultaneously ensuring that our magnet theme and foci are woven into the educational experience. Our interactive science lab and school gardens allow students to act as environmental scientists as they explore ways to solve real-world problems. Technology integration experiences are enhanced through robotics, coding, Makerspace, open STEM lab, Destination Imagination, and more! In addition, all WHAM learners, whether they are virtual or face-to-face, have access to weekly ancillary classes such as art, music, Spanish, physical education, computer lab, and library.

It is also our goal that students learn social and emotional responsibility by caring for themselves, others, and nature. Students across grade levels participate in theme-based citizen scientists projects which expose them to real-world environmental science topics and issues. These projects include tagging Monarch butterflies for the University of Kansas, Project FeederWatch, participating in conserving Louisiana's coastline through the LSU Coastal Roots project, and caring for the school gardens and pond. Students also serve as presenters at Ocean Commotion, which is designed to teach children about the products of the sea and coast.

Additionally, WHAM is a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School; therefore, all students, teachers, and staff participate in school-wide recycling and composting. Through this initiative, students learn the academic content related to caring for our environment and experience the social responsibility of being good stewards of resources.

WHAM families reside in various areas of the East Baton Rouge Parish School District, which results in a broad spectrum of students who represent various cultures, races, religions, and socioeconomic statuses. WHAM's diverse population provides our students with authentic opportunities for relationship building with classmates from different backgrounds. These relationships foster citizenship, conflict resolution, and collaboration, which strengthen the school community. Despite the variance in family backgrounds, students across subgroups consistently outscore both the district and state in student proficiency on standardized assessments. In fact, WHAM previously received the U.S. Department of Education "National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence" award in 2008. The standards, curriculum, and standardized assessment program used throughout the state of Louisiana has evolved over the years; however, WHAM students continue to demonstrate academic excellence.

Students, families, and community stakeholders are integral to the success of WHAM. During a typical school year, volunteers are on our campus on a daily basis to provide a multitude of services and support to teachers and students, serving as volunteers for field trips, service projects, and classroom support. Parents are often visible in the classroom, sharing their careers and expertise. They also provide a monthly lunch to the teachers and staff to recognize and support the efforts of the school. Parents provide support, but also the stimulus to embrace new ideas and embark upon different educational opportunities.

During the COVID-19 closures and challenges, the physical and emotional well-being of our staff, students, and families have remained our top priority. We believe that the best teaching and learning takes place when everyone feels safe and cared for. Due to the numerous updates and changes, communication between the home and school has been more important than ever. WHAM staff, students and families have done a



phenomenal job adjusting at a moment's notice and adapting to the new set of circumstances. We have all realized through experience that we can do hard things together, and we believe that the recent challenges have only strengthened our school community.

At WHAM, we work tirelessly to challenge all students to reach their full potential by fostering academic achievement while simultaneously instilling the love of learning in our students. In addition, we strive to maintain a school culture that embraces acceptance while denouncing prejudice and discrimination.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

At WHAM, we are committed to providing high-quality instruction that is aligned to the Louisiana Student Standards for all content areas.

Our curriculum, instruction, and assessments have shifted to comply with our current operating schedule. Teachers are simultaneously facilitating lessons to virtual and face-to-face students; however, tier 1 curriculum resources, along with supplemental materials, allow teachers to provide rigorous, yet meaningful instruction. To support student learning, increase student engagement, and provide formative assessment data, teachers create interactive presentations using Google Slides, Nearpod, Pear Deck, and more! Additionally, many summative assessments are administered using online programs such as Edulastic, Google Forms, and DRC Insight. Virtual students have access to all classroom and ancillary instruction, digital and print curriculum resources, and assessments.

A student’s reading ability is critical to academic success in all subject areas. Our data shows that K-1 students possess vast differences in reading levels, which are determined at the beginning of the year using Renaissance STAR Reading Assessment combined with the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). To ensure that all students acquire the ability to read and understand on or above level texts in foundational grades and are prepared to tackle complex texts that they will encounter in the upper grades, the Guided Reading approach is used. This approach allows teachers to tailor reading instruction to meet the needs of students as individual learners by providing leveled instruction. K-1 teachers progress monitor through RAZ Kids and DRA. The results are used to group and determine goals for students. Many of our youngest learners have remained virtual; however, our K-1 teachers provide equitable instruction by engaging virtual students in small group instruction using Google Meet. Reading instruction shifts in grade 2 when students begin “reading to learn” rather than “learning to read”. Students in second grade access the ELA standards through Junior Great Books and Wit & Wisdom. Junior Great Books uses a “Shared Inquiry” approach which requires students to think deeply and discuss ideas related to texts. Wit & Wisdom allows students to deepen their content knowledge on selected topics, strengthen their ability to close-read texts, and build a foundation for using inferencing and text evidence in writing. Students in grades 3-5 access the ELA standards through the Louisiana ELA Guidebook Units which are designed to prepare students for ELA state assessments by offering a variety of texts, critical thinking activities, and opportunities to engage in numerous types of writing. All WHAM students have access to Accelerated Reader (AR) which is a motivational tool, as well as a formative assessment piece for teachers.

The Eureka Math curriculum is used for tier 1 instruction in grades K-5. This curriculum is designed to teach math as an ongoing “story” and progresses in a way that is meaningful for students. Through the lessons, students are able to improve math fluency, deepen conceptual understanding, practice computational skills, and apply learning through word problems. Teachers monitor students’ mastery through formative assessments (exit tickets), and summative assessments (topic and module assessments). Intervention and enrichment are provided through small-group instruction in Zearn, IXL, and Happy Numbers.

Our district recently adopted Amplify Science as the tier 1 science curriculum. Teachers and students have utilized the digital components of this program to ensure that high-quality, standards-based science lessons are being provided to our virtual and face-to-face learners. The interactive tools and books have allowed students to investigate scientific concepts and read texts related to core science topics. Additionally, there are a multitude of opportunities for students to think like scientists and engineers, which reinforces our STEM culture. Ensuring that content knowledge is put into action, our science specialist, classroom and ancillary teachers collaborate to plan inquiry-based science opportunities utilizing our science lab, koi pond, and gardens, including our Metamorphosis Children’s Garden.

At WHAM, our plan for social studies instruction is multifaceted. First, it is crucial that students know and understand grade-level specific social studies content. Second, students must be able to interpret and think critically as they explore primary and secondary sources. Third, students must be able to combine content

knowledge with information gained from sources to answer document-based questions (DBQ). These questions require students to make and support a claim through oral language and/or writing. To ensure that all students have an opportunity to delve into core content, analyze various types of sources, and make and support claims, we have implemented the use of Studies Weekly. This student-friendly core curriculum presents content related to civics and government, geography, economics, and history in a way that is meaningful, relevant, and engaging. Students and teachers have access to print and digital resources, including assessments for each lesson. In addition to Studies Weekly, various supplemental resources such as Scholastic News, Achieve3000, Discovery Education and more to increase rigor and give students experiences that simulate the thinking required on state assessments.

**1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):**

**1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:**

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Aligning with our vision of nurturing the whole child, all WHAM students participate in weekly ancillary courses including art, physical education, Spanish, computer lab, library, music, and science lab. To ensure all students have access to every component of our magnet program, ancillary teachers use Google Meet to instruct virtual and face-to-face learners simultaneously. WHAM provides all students, including virtual learners, with necessary materials for upcoming lessons. Additionally, Google Classroom is used to enhance and enrich daily instruction for both face-to-face and virtual students.

In art class, students participate in artist studies, compete in art challenges, and repurpose materials to create works of art. Digital media such as stop-motion animation, a green screen, iPads, a digital camera, photography studio and more are used to explore academic concepts. During the COVID-19 operating schedule, our art instructor continues to motivate face-to-face students through self-selected art exploration during Genius Hour. Additionally, a virtual art club is available for students through the use of Google Classroom.

Health and wellness studies through the collaboration of our physical education instructor and Louisiana State University provide the "Smart Bodies" program which helps promote proper nutrition and exercise for healthy lives.

Our tech lab provides opportunities for students to participate in self-selected projects using the engineering design process. An open STEM lab, where students tinker with reusable materials and technology, is available to satisfy the curiosity of even our most innovative students. In our LEGO Engineering Lab, students use the Lego WeDo 2.0 robotics curriculum to solve real-world problems. Students also use 3D printers, sewing machines, Makey Makey and a Makerspace Circuit Kit to brainstorm, research, design, test, improve and share their unique ideas as they explore during Genius Hour. WHAM has also implemented Destination Imagination, which weaves multiple aspects of learning, including deep inquiry and research. Students also have the opportunity to participate virtually in Hour of Code and a virtual robotics club.

Our music instructor connects lessons to academic concepts by having students read texts that deepen their academic vocabulary and background knowledge relating to musical instruments, musicals, and famous musicians. Student engagement and motivation of virtual and face-to-face learners has been increased through the creation of a virtual music room, the experience of virtual field trips, and teaching students to play virtual instruments.

Our science lab is an integral part of our students' authentic learning opportunities. WHAM's science specialist and classroom teachers collaborate to provide students with hands-on, innovative STEM experiences. In our science lab, students explore anchor phenomena aligned to the Louisiana Student NBR 2021

Standards for science as they work to solve real-world problems. Each grade level participates in activities, including working in our school gardens, that foster a deeper understanding of the crosscutting concepts. Students in grade K-5 attend science lab once a week for one hour.

All ancillary teachers are intentional in their planning to ensure that instruction supports core content, and aligns to our magnet theme of academics and magnet focus on environmental science mathematics and technology.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

At Westdale Heights Academic Magnet (WHAM), expectations are high for all students. We work diligently to instill confidence that fosters our students' ability to reach their fullest potential by providing educational experiences that deepen content knowledge and sharpen critical thinking skills.

Despite the major shifts in education, raising the expectations for what students in all grades across content areas are responsible for knowing and being able to do, WHAM students continue to excel, exhibiting proficiency rates between 98 and 100 percent across all content areas on Louisiana's standardized assessment program (LEAP 2025). WHAM students consistently outperform the district and state in student proficiency in all content areas, but more importantly, the majority of students in grades 3-5 achieve mastery and advanced. Based on 2019 LEAP data for grades 3-5, 93% of our students scored mastery or advanced in English Language Arts, and 98% of our students scored mastery or advanced in math. As a result, WHAM is ranked as the number one elementary school in the Baton Rouge area and is 5th out of 731 elementary schools across the state of Louisiana.

At WHAM, there is a tradition of academic excellence from students of all demographic groups. Archive assessment data, from 2016 to the present, shows no significant disparity across subgroups of students in grades 3-5 at WHAM. The authentic, rigorous, and standards-based learning experiences provided in our core classes, electives, and co-curricular activities put students across all demographic groups on an equal playing field.

To ensure every child's success, student progress is consistently monitored. Students demonstrating mastery of core content have opportunities for enrichment, while students on track towards mastery receive targeted interventions. Students showing consistent gaps in their learning are scheduled to work with our instructional interventionist. The interventions provided are tailored for individual student needs in various content areas. Aligning to our vision of educating the whole child, our interventionist also assists with organizational or social skills that may be hindering a student's progress.

In addition to schoolwide intervention and enrichment, students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) are supported by a resource teacher. Students identified as having speech or language delays attend weekly sessions with our site-based speech therapist. Our district also supports students by providing occupational therapy, physical therapy, and adaptive physical education. English Language Learners (ELL) are actively monitored and receive services from a district ELL teacher, if needed. Through accelerated curriculum resources, students identified as "gifted" are consistently challenged to think at a complex level.

WHAM identifies and supports students exhibiting academic, behavioral, or social concerns. Our School Building Level Committee, consisting of the counselor, teachers, parents, and school leadership, determines the needs of the student, and develops an action plan. All WHAM staff is charged with providing accommodations/modifications to maximize learning for all students,

including those with 504 plans, IEPs, and ELL students.

The rigorous, classroom instruction paired with challenging and exciting hands-on experiences, have been crucial in preparing our students for success on state assessments, but more importantly, for life.

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

The academic theme and magnet focus on environmental science, mathematics, and technology are integrated throughout core classes, electives, and co-curricular activities. All components are integrated to ensure that students remain engaged and motivated in their academics, as well as in the school community.

As a Green Ribbon School, WHAM students have opportunities to act as environmental scientists. Through Amplify Science resources and Discovery Education’s online techbook, students are exposed to science content in their core classes. With the support from our science specialist, students take part in real-world environmental science experiences through the use of our gardens and science lab. Students participate in hands-on science experiments involving inquiry, problem and project-based learning, while reaping the rewards of two instructional leaders. The scientific process is taught along with the latest technology such as ActivPanels, Chromebooks, iPads, electronic projection microscopes, 3D Rover, portable planetarium, data loggers, and electronic probes. Live animals and a weather lab allow students to develop responsibility as they care for the animals and give daily weather reports, just like real meteorologists.

Students participate in co-curricular activities centered around our theme and foci such as LSU Coastal Roots, which is a seedling nursery program for habitat restoration, and Project FeederWatch, a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders across North America. Students count birds they observe at their feeders and send data to Project FeederWatch. Students also participate in Monarch Watch, an affiliate program with the Kansas Biological Survey, which engages citizen scientists in research projects involving the tagging and tracking of monarchs, producing data on migration and conservation issues. In addition to being good stewards of Earth’s resources, we instill the responsibility to protect Earth’s animals. “Wildlife Warrior” week is centered around activities that bring awareness to conserving our wildlife. Barn Hill Preserve and Wild Babies Care Sanctuary visit our campus during this week to share their work.

During school closures, student engagement and motivation was promoted through virtual field trips and the purchase of additional online platforms that are highly engaging and allow students to work on activities aligned to their instructional level.

Our Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) is implemented schoolwide with monthly celebrations. Students earn free dress days, holiday-themed attire days, no homework passes, ice cream treats, egg hunts, and will receive snowballs at the end of the year. PBIS provides a positive, effective alternative to the traditional methods of discipline.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

WHAM has long-standing commitments from community groups that work alongside us to enrich our magnet theme. A local hydrologist works with students to collect data for the Cornell University Project FeederWatch. Wild Babies Care Sanctuary, a local wildlife rehabilitator, partners with WHAM by participating in a week of events centered on protecting and preserving local wildlife. In connection with this partnership, WHAM students teach other students about endangered wildlife at “Ocean Commotion”.

Our partnership with Louisiana State University has impacted our magnet program. A professor in the College of Human Sciences supports students with the LSU Coastal Roots program. Students grow plants from seedlings, and plant them at a local reserve, to help preserve Louisiana’s coastline. The LSU Veterinary School works to deepen students’ understanding of creating a safe environment for animals in captivity. Through the Resident Raptors program, they teach the importance of wildlife conservation.

Pre-COVID, parents are visible in the classroom, sharing their expertise, serving as chaperones on field trips, participating in service projects, and more. The WHAM PTO mission is to create an energized and supportive environment for students, teachers, and parents. By supporting the relationships between teachers and parents, WHAM PTO creates a stronger community, enables teachers to succeed in higher-level

teaching, and offers students exceptional school experiences.

“Safety Town” took place for K-1 students to learn about pedestrian and bicycle safety. The project was supported by The Safety Place, ICARE (a district program that provides prevention education), Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Hospital, and the Sheriff’s Office Community Policing Unit. The culminating activity included a tricycle ride to practice safety, and all students received a free bicycle helmet.

During a recycling competition, WHAM was recognized by the mayor for collecting and recycling a total of 326 pounds of flexible plastic, more than any other school participating in the competition. We received a park bench made from post-consumer material that is displayed in our school garden.

Parent and community stakeholders are integral to our success and are often the stimulus for embracing innovative educational opportunities. COVID-19 has modified parent and community partnerships, but we have creatively implemented ways to promote engagement. Virtual book talks and field trips help bring parents and community partners in the classroom. Conferences still remain virtual but are scheduled weekly to communicate with families and monitor student progress.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

Throughout the challenging transition from virtual to hybrid learning, and now a combination of both face-to-face and virtual learning, WHAM has focused on maintaining a positive school environment that helps teachers and staff members feel encouraged, supported, and valued throughout the pandemic. Supporting our educators’ well-being through compassion and communication have been a top priority. From coaching and feedback, respecting the value of time, and modeling compassion, it has been our goal to provide multifaceted support to our teachers and staff.

Designated planning time throughout the day allows teacher to enhance their knowledge of virtual instructional practices, participate in reflection related to student achievement data, and ensure that instructional goals are aligned with our magnet theme, as well as the Louisiana Student Standards and GLEs (Grade-Level Expectations). Content-specific vertical PLCs provide teachers across grade levels with an opportunity to align the progression of standards-based instruction in content areas.

Teachers continuously examine assessment data and student work with our leadership team. Some topics are directly related to the magnet theme of academics which include: Louisiana state standards, LEAP 2025 and LEAP 360 (Louisiana Educational Assessment Program), academic progress monitoring, data analysis, best practices, differentiated instruction, formative/summative assessments, using technology in the classroom, and emotional support.

Teachers in grades 3-5 participate in vertical planning to ensure the alignment of the curriculum from grade to grade. Teachers in grades K-2 meet with their colleagues to guarantee the alignment of the standards, instructional best practices, and curriculum across grade levels. This ongoing professional development ensures commonality of instructional goals, enhancement of teacher practice, and increases student achievement. Ancillary teachers meet to discuss student progress and work to align their classes to the academic magnet theme. All professional development activities enhance instructional delivery related to our theme of academics and magnet foci of environmental science, mathematics, and technology.

The WHAM PTO helps support and recognize our valuable teachers by recognizing them each month through delivered lunches, Teacher Appreciation Week, raffles, and other continuous support throughout the year. Our leadership team and ancillary teachers help cover classes, as needed. Through each transition of learning, the school culture at WHAM has remained united to move forward and work on closing any learning gaps as a result of the pandemic.

### **4. School Leadership:**

The WHAM leadership team actively creates a culture based on values and beliefs about teaching and learning. Students are supported through challenging, equitable educational programs to create engaging

learning experiences. Our leadership philosophy is to lead by example and work collaboratively as a team to achieve all goals. A new principal was hired at WHAM in January; the transition has been very smooth and successful. A leadership team was created to review and revise action steps needed to increase student achievement. The team also reviews and discusses school policies, procedures, and areas of in need of improvement. Throughout COVID-19, all stakeholders on campus have remained committed to stay focused on student achievement. By helping parents understand that health and safety are our top priority, many parents have chosen to allow their students to return to school as a face-to-face learner. Modifications have been made to maintain a functioning campus. Drive-through pick-ups and drop offs ensure that health and safety guidelines are followed. Conferences and meetings are held virtually to maintain social distancing.

School leaders systematically collect and analyze multiple types of data including classroom walk-throughs and observations, surveys, and student assessment data. The collected data identifies goals and measurable performance targets to improve instructional practices and increase student achievement. Frequent conversations about data occur weekly between students, teachers, and parents.

WHAM's master schedule provides opportunities for common planning periods and encourages collaboration through professional learning communities (PLCs). The school leadership and staff share high expectations for professional practice. Individually, and in collaboration with colleagues, teachers use a variety of data to evaluate outcomes of teaching and learning and to adapt planning and practice. PLC meetings support the educational programs and challenging learning experiences for all students.

This semester, the leadership team identified students in need of additional academic support. An instructional interventionist was hired to provide remediation and assist in closing learning gaps. The students have improved and are now in good academic standing. The interventionist has been able to rotate students in and out of her groups, as needed.

## **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

The diversity goal of WHAM is to prepare students to live and work in a global society by supporting a teaching-learning environment where all employees and students value commonalities and differences across gender, culture, and socioeconomic status.

Our plan for accomplishing our diversity goal is by implementing schoolwide strategies that promote the exchange of ideas between students. A school-wide book study on classroom habitudes resulted in the creation of the WHAM Habitudes of growth mindset, perseverance, gratitude, mindfulness, creativity, and empathy. Classroom teachers reinforce the habitudes by facilitating collaborative conversations between students, and work diligently to ensure that students feel valued, safe, and challenged, as they engage in authentic learning experiences.

Additionally, we incorporate monthly incentives that encourage students to follow our Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) expectations. Through these incentives, students of different backgrounds come together and celebrate their collaborative effort in creating a respectful school environment.

In order to maximize diversity in our academic program, our core curriculum provides students with opportunities to study the beliefs and customs of various cultures. For example, Junior Great Books and ELA Guidebooks are part of our English/Language Arts curriculum, both providing opportunities for engaging in multicultural, project-based learning based on books written by diverse authors. Social Studies instruction focuses on the use of primary and secondary sources to gain information related to the customs, traditions, and beliefs of different groups of people. The various science curriculum resources allow students to experience other parts of the world through virtual field trips and explore diversity through simulations. Additionally, Scholastic News is a resource used for students to engage in discussions related to current events around the world.



Additionally, diversity is infused throughout WHAM's ancillary classes. Our library has an extensive collection of novels from cultures around the globe. The Spanish program encompasses language acquisition, culture, and heritage into lessons for all grade levels. In music, students read about musicians with diverse backgrounds and learn songs from around the world. Our art program gives students the opportunity to take part in diverse artist studies and discover how subject, culture, and style play a significant role in the creation of art.

We are fortunate to serve students and families who are from all over the world, and we pride ourselves in providing opportunities to experience and appreciate the culture of others. We believe that with knowledge comes understanding and tolerance.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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One specific practice that has been instrumental in helping Westdale Heights Academic Magnet School continue supporting students to the fullest extent possible, and remain successful, is continuous communication. At the start of the pandemic, it was clear that we would face a multitude of new challenges, and that a plan would be needed to maintain strong home-school community relationships. Online platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Meet, Seesaw, Remind, our WHAM app, school website, and social media were maintained or established as communication tools to keep students, teachers, and families informed.

To ensure equitable access to all learning experiences, and to keep students engaged in our school community, all classroom and ancillary teachers have used Google Meet to host their instructional sessions. This has allowed virtual students numerous opportunities to collaborate with peers and teachers, which is a crucial component for maintaining a healthy school culture. Additionally, teachers have been intentional in incorporating interactive presentations such as Nearpod and Pear Deck which hold the interest of our learners and played a role in building and maintaining teacher-student relationships.

Communication has been a key factor in ensuring that teachers and staff receive timely updates from district and school administration. In addition, since teachers and staff have not been able to meet in person for faculty meetings and professional learning communities, consistent communication using online platforms have been critical in maintaining professional relationships between teachers and staff.

Consistent communication regarding student progress has been more important than ever. Virtual conferences, daily phone calls, and online communication tools have assisted in keeping parents updated regarding current assignments, assessments, and academic standing. Student progress monitoring data is communicated with families to support both students and teachers. Enrichment and remediation opportunities remain in place and are communicated with parents weekly. It has been our goal to maintain the strong relationships that have been built between our staff and families, and we have been intentional in making sure these relationships continue to thrive.

While procedures and routines have been modified and adapted, academic goals and rigorous expectations have remained the same. It is important for WHAM to continue providing equitable opportunities for all students and promoting growth mindsets to create independent learners and thinkers. By fostering strong relationships, and promoting effective communication, virtual and face-to-face learning has left a positive impact on our school culture.